Welcome & Introduction, Karl Hakanson, UM Extension-Hennepin County and Network Coordinator. Hakanson reiterated the purpose of the Network; to engage in peer-to-peer, in-place learning in an atmosphere of inquiry and camaraderie, focused on improving everyone’s horticultural endeavors.

Danny Schwartzman (left), Owner, Common Roots Cafe, talked about how sustainability and local foods are baked in to the day-to-day operations of the cafe and catering company that has been serving up local and organic food since opening in 2007. Schwartzman explained why sourcing direct from farmers is such an important part of their business model, saying, “We have never ordered food from the wholesale delivery truck”. He described how it takes more work to do business this way but that the direct relationships with farmers that share the cafe’s social and environmental goals makes it all worthwhile.

Marjorie Hegstrom (right), Gardener, Common Roots Cafe, led a tour of the on-site kitchen garden and described the ongoing evolution of managing a garden that supplies directly to the cafe. Hegstrom described the purpose of the garden and how it fits in to the overall operation, adding, “The evening was a great chance to share the cafe garden with fellow growers and discuss common successes and challenges. I really appreciated having the perspectives and expertise of the Extension specialists as well.”

Natalie Hoidal (left), U of MN Extension Educator, Horticulture & Food System Agriculture, led a discussion on crop rotations and getting the most from small garden spaces. Hoidal discussed soil health, insect and disease management, succession planting, and prioritizing how best to use space in a small garden. She provided a great rundown on aspects to consider, such as size and spacing of mature plants and putting spacing into the context of succession and companion planting. She also covered ensuring your soil is properly fertilized, scouting often for diseases and insects, planting habitat for pollinators and other beneficial insects, which includes planning to have floral resources throughout the season.

Cindy Tong (right), Professor and Extension Postharvest Horticulturist, UMN Dept. of Horticulture, briefed us on safe handling of garden produce. Tong contrasted the rules required for commercial growers, and why they are in place to protect public health, with common sense precautions for small volume growers who sell produce to other people, and for anyone growing and sharing fresh produce. These included keeping pet poop –including backyard poultry, off the food, avoid putting food on the ground, making a habit of washing hands and tools to keep off human pathogens, and, remembering that some customers may have delicate immune systems.

Check out the TC Metro Growers Network Web Page: www.sfa-mn.org/twin-cities-growers-network

Herbs and more direct from the garden to the Chef’s recipes … … food scraps, organics returned to the garden, composted for soil health, increased productivity!